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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Discussion guide for the high-level round table on access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work

Note by the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women

I. Background

1. At its fiftieth session, held in 2006, the Commission decided that the annual interactive high-level round table would focus on experiences, lessons learned and good practices in relation to the implementation of previous commitments made with regard to the priority theme.[1]

II. Organizational matters

Theme

2. The high-level round table will focus on the priority theme of the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, "Access and participation of

* E/CN.6/2011/1

[1] Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/9, para. 3.

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women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work".[2]

Participants

3. The high-level round table provides an opportunity for high-level representatives of Member States attending the fifty-fifth session of the Commission to engage in dialogue and share experiences and lessons learned. The high-level representatives may include: ministers of women's affairs; heads of national mechanisms for gender equality; and senior officials from other relevant ministries, such as those of education, labour, trade, industry, science and technology, development, foreign affairs, finance, health, agriculture, energy and the environment, as well as national statistical offices. The high-level round table will be open to other members of the Commission and observers.

Timing

4. The high-level round table will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 22 February 2011, from 3 to 6 p.m.

Format

5. To allow for interactions among as many participants as possible, the round table will be conducted simultaneously in two parallel meetings on the same theme.

6. The chairs of the two parallel meetings will guide the discussions with a view to promoting the interactive nature of the round table. Interventions shall not exceed three minutes. Speakers will be encouraged to ask questions and offer comments on interventions made during the dialogue. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

7. Each meeting of the round table will be introduced by a keynote speaker. A senior official from an entity of the United Nations system and a representative of a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council will provide comments at the end of the dialogue and respond to the discussion.

Outcome

8. The outcome of the high-level round table will be a summary by the Chair.

[2] Economic and Social Council resolution 2009/15, para. 2 (b).

III. Elements for discussion in the high-level round table

A. Background

9. The issues covered in the Commission's priority theme of 2011 have, to different degrees and from particular perspectives and approaches, been part of past intergovernmental discussions and outcomes. The main policy instruments and guidance are summarized below.

10. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), highlighted the equal access of women and girls to education and employment as part of the global policy framework for women's human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Platform confirmed education as a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace. Governments were urged to eliminate disparities between women and men in access to education and educational outcomes at all levels and in all forms of education, including primary, secondary and tertiary education, vocational training, adult literacy and lifelong learning, in line with the outcome of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All.

11. The Platform recognized the importance of women's access to full employment and decent work in addressing the economic potential and independence of women. Governments and all stakeholders were called upon to eliminate all forms of gender-based discrimination in the labour market, including discriminatory hiring and promotion practices and occupational segregation, to promote women's equal rights to resources, employment, markets and trades, and to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making (paras. 165, 166, 178 and 190).

12. The Platform called on Governments and all stakeholders to increase women's access to and retention in science and technology, including by adapting curricula and teaching materials and by increasing the share of women teachers in scientific and technological disciplines at all levels of education (paras. 82 (g) and 83 (f)), and to help advance opportunities for women in science and technology (paras. 82 (c) and (e) and 85 (b)). Emphasis was placed on the need to promote gender-sensitive and women-centred health research, treatment and technology, to link traditional and indigenous knowledge with modern medicine (para. 109 (b)), as well as to create training, research and resource centres that disseminate environmentally sound technologies to women (para. 258 (b) (v)). The need for legislative and administrative reforms to give women equal rights with men to economic resources such as access to appropriate new technology (para. 165 (e)) was also mentioned. The need for outreach programmes to inform low-income and poor women, particularly in rural and remote areas, of opportunities for market and technology access, and assistance in taking advantage of such opportunities (para. 173 (c)) was highlighted.

13. At the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in June 2000, Governments called for equal access to education and elimination of gender disparities in education, including vocational training, and science and technology (para. 67 (a)). They highlighted the need to develop policies and programmes to enhance the employability of women and their access to quality jobs, through improving access to formal, non-formal and vocational training, lifelong learning

and retraining, and long-distance education (para. 82 (e)). The importance of addressing gender stereotyping as one of the root causes of occupational segregation was emphasized (para. 82 (j)), as were the need to encourage and support the education of girls in science, mathematics, new technologies, including information technologies, and technical subjects, and the need to encourage women, including through career counselling, to seek employment in high-growth and high-wage sectors and jobs (para. 82 (i)). The importance of providing access to and control over technology, particularly for women living in poverty and for women entrepreneurs, was emphasized (paras. 74 (a) and 82 (g)) (see A/S-23/13).

14. The Commission on the Status of Women last considered education and training as a priority theme in 1997. Since then, it has included critical aspects of women's and girls' access to and participation in education, training, science and technology, as well as access to decent work in its deliberations and outcomes, most recently in its agreed conclusions of 2007 on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child (see E/2007/27).

15. In its agreed conclusions on women and the environment (1997), the Commission urged stakeholders to support the role of women in developing environmentally sound technologies and in influencing the development of new and appropriate technologies (see E/1997/27). In its agreed conclusions on education and training of women (1997), the Commission called on stakeholders to give renewed importance to education in mathematics, science and technology for girls and women, including the use of information technology. The Commission also encouraged women's participation in development of new technologies, from design to application, monitoring and evaluation (ibid.).

16. In its agreed conclusions on participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women (2003), the Commission noted the potential of using technologies to advance women's employment opportunities through equal access for women to economic activities based on information and communication technologies (ICT), to information systems and improved technologies, and to new employment opportunities in this area (see E/2003/27). In the agreed conclusions on enhanced participation of women in development (2006) the Commission highlighted the need to increase women's and girls' equal and effective access to and use of information and communication technologies, as well as applied technology (see E/2006/27). In the agreed conclusions on financing gender equality and the empowerment of women (2008) the Commission recognized the importance of assisting women-owned businesses in participating in and benefiting from technological innovation and transfer (see E/2008/27).

17. The Commission on Science and Technology for Development has given visibility to gender equality considerations in its annual resolutions on science and technology for development. It is also the only functional commission that has established a Gender Advisory Board, which provides advice on the gender perspectives of the Commission's work. At its eighth session (2005), the Commission called on Governments to strengthen science and technology educational systems through strong gender policies that ensure equal access to technological and scientific studies for both women and men (see E/2005/31). At its twelfth session (2009), the Commission called on Governments to expand

opportunities for science, technology and engineering education and research, and to provide broadband connectivity, especially for women (see E/2009/31). During a panel discussion on the theme "Gender and science and technology" at the Commission's thirteenth session (2010), Governments and the international community were called upon to work towards a greater role for women in science and technology as well as greater use of science and technology to address women's needs (see E/2010/92).

18. The World Summit on the Information Society, in the Geneva Plan of Action (2003) (see A/C.2/59/3) and the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (2005) (see A/60/687), recognized the importance of promoting women's participation in ICT, including at decision-making levels. It called for equal training opportunities in ICT-related fields for women and early intervention programmes in science and technology, targeted at young girls, in order to increase the number of women in ICT careers. It also highlighted the need for gender-responsive ICT policies. At the 2005 World Summit, Governments committed to ensuring women's equal access to productive assets and resources, including technology.[3]

19. Concrete goals have been set at global level for women's and girls' access to and participation in education and full employment, to be reached by 2015. The World Education Forum in the Dakar Framework for Action[4] (2000) set the six Education for All (EFA) goals, two of which specifically aim at achieving gender equality in education. Two of the eight Millennium Development Goals aim at gender equality and education. Goal 2 aims at universal primary education, while one of the targets under Goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment is to eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education no later than 2015.

B. Discussion guide

20. During the round table, high-level representatives from Member States are expected to focus on lessons learned, achievements and good practices, as well as gaps and challenges, with supporting data where available, with respect to implementation at the national level of commitments on the priority theme.

21. At the national level, different stakeholders contribute to realizing girls' and women's access to and participation in the areas identified in the theme, and to implementing previous commitments and actions. Participants may wish to provide information, based on their national experiences, actions taken, lessons learned and good or promising practices in relation to the following issues:

(a) Actions taken and results achieved for women and girls in high-quality formal and non-formal education at all levels. This could include: successful policies and programmes that have resulted in marked increases in women's and girls' access to and participation in formal as well as non-formal education; effective teacher qualification processes, teacher training in gender-sensitive teaching methods and development of gender-sensitive curricula and materials; successful literacy and job training programmes; educational initiatives that have resulted in measurable reductions in gender stereotypes; and measures that have encouraged

[3] See General Assembly resolution 60/1.

[4] See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Final Report of the World Education Forum* (Paris, 2000).

girls and women, as well as boys and men, to participate in non-traditional fields of study;

(b) Actions taken and results achieved for women and girls in science and technology. This could include: interventions to increase the number of women and girls in science and technology education and employment; steps taken and results achieved to overcome gender stereotypes and gender bias in science and technology;

(c) Linking women's and girls' educational achievements in all fields, especially in science and technology, with commensurate opportunities in the labour market. This could include examples of policies and strategies that have resulted in: improved transitioning of women from school/training to work; removal of barriers women face in labour force participation; improved retention and career development of women; reduced occupational segregation as well as vertical segregation; and support for women entrepreneurs;

(d) Policies and measures that have resulted in the elimination of gender bias in scientific research and technology development. This could include: changing research priorities and goals to take into account the needs of women and girls, men and boys; providing funds to mainstream gender analysis methodologies in scientific research; and building capacity on gender issues in research, development and innovation; and

(e) Actions taken to advance towards the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, through women's access to and use of technology. This could include: strengthening research capacities; improving the process of development, production and distribution of technologies; and strengthening technological collaborations and partnerships.